



Families First

My Family loves the holidays. Any reason to dress up, decorate and invite people over is cause for excitement in our house, and I can't help but get caught up in the joy of the season too. Those closest to me have supported me through numerous deployments and truly are my strength, but we aren't unique. All across our Army, Families are sustaining their Soldiers and each other with the same determination that has made my career possible. They are, each and every one, truly remarkable!

One of the things that's surprised me during my visits to installations is the enthusiasm spouses and other Family members bring to safety. I've either led or participated in a good number of spouses' briefings now, and I'm still amazed at how quickly wives and husbands "get" the safety message. This is stuff we've been drilling into Soldiers' heads for years, yet it's the Families who pick up on it the fastest. The problem isn't an intellectual disparity — it's tunnel vision.

Sometimes, Soldiers are so used to doing what they do, they can't see the hazards behind it. Even though spouses are removed from the work environment, they still glean enough from what their Soldiers say to recognize the risk. They also have unmatched personal insight into their Soldiers' off-duty lives. If you have a Soldier who drives or rides recklessly, you can bet his or her spouse knows about it and probably feels powerless to stop it. You need to give them the power by involving them in your unit safety programs.

I understand the reluctance of some leaders to take this step. We've come a long way in recognizing the importance of Families, but institutional barriers still exist in wholly integrating them into the Army's day-to-day operations. There's no reason for that to be a problem with safety, however. Families are who we should naturally be turning to in addressing off-duty fatalities. They have the access and the time with their Soldiers to really make a difference, given the opportunity by leaders and safety professionals in the field.

A few years ago, the USACR/Safety Center released the Family Engagement Kit, a compilation of resources and multimedia products designed for Family readiness groups, quality of life representatives and Army chaplains. It's been updated every year since then but hasn't gotten the same visibility as some of our other products, which has done our Families a disservice. Without fail, the spouses and Family members we brief are enthusiastic and eager for a kit of their own when they learn about it. But they shouldn't have to hear about the FEK or any other safety tools from me; they should be getting their information from you.

Here's your chance to fill that gap. This month, we'll release the fiscal 2013 FEK update at <https://safety.army.mil>. That's just in time for the holidays and allows you ample opportunity to brief your Families on off-duty safety. Many well-meaning spouses will spend a lot of money to make their Soldiers happy with expensive gifts like motorcycles or handguns, without giving a second thought to the training and experience required to enjoy them safely. Inevitably, we always lose a few Soldiers to negligent discharges and motorcycle accidents around the time of the holiday exodus. Cut the risk now by making Families part of the solution.

We closed fiscal 2012 with the second-lowest accidental fatalities on record — that's irrefutable proof of the amazing job each of you does every day. Remember you don't have to do it alone; your Soldiers' Families

will be happy and eager to help you out. Involving them will take your safety program to the next level, and our Soldiers deserve nothing less.

I wish you all a happy, healthy and safe holiday!

Army Safe is Army Strong!

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Richard D. Stidley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "R" and a long, sweeping underline.

Richard D. Stidley
Command Sergeant Major